

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: March 10, 2016

Agenda Item: Cabinet Gorge Reservoir Bridge Construction Closure

Division: Fisheries

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 Min

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Background:

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) along with their contractor, Dick Anderson Construction, is replacing the existing Heron Road bridge across Cabinet Gorge Reservoir on the Clark Fork river. Due to required construction means and methods, along with safety concerns, we are requesting a 72 hour closure of the waters approximately 1,500' upstream and downstream from the work site.

During this 72 hour closure period, an approximately 320' long barge will be blocking the majority of the navigable waterway. The work taking place during this time period will create substantial hazards for waterway users, and any wakes or water disturbances will increase those potential hazards. Therefore, it will be safest for the MDT personnel, construction employees and the public for these waters to be closed during this operation.

The Contractor will be responsible for posting closure signs on both banks approximately 1,500' upstream and downstream of the structure work. Two steady burn lights will be attached to each sign. The Contractor will also post notifications of the closure at the Sanders County Heron boat ramp, Big Eddy boat ramp and the Bull River boat ramp. This notification will also be posted with the local newspaper and the local radio station, and be issued approximately two to four weeks prior to the closure.

Public Involvement Process & Results:

Environmental documentation has been prepared and the project qualifies as a Categorical Exclusion in compliance with the Administrative Rules of Montana and Federal Highway Administration requirements outlined in 23 CFR 771.117. MDT analyzed the No Action alternative; however, the No Action alternative does not meet the purpose and need of the project and would not enhance the safety of the traveling public using Heron Road across Cabinet Gorge Reservoir.

Alternatives & Analysis:

The Commission could choose not to propose a ruling to close the work site on the Reservoir. This would result in a significant increase in risk, and decrease the level of safety for MDT staff, contractors, and the public.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale:

FWP recommends that the Commission authorize the proposed closure rule. The rule would allow FWP to assess the contractor's request with input from MDT for a closure and determine if one is needed and if alternatives would have less impact on recreation without jeopardizing public safety.

Proposed Motion:

I move that the Commission propose a one-instance rule authorizing FWP, in consultation with the local F&W Commissioner, to temporarily close a portion of the Cabinet Gorge Reservoir to address public safety concerns related to the repair of the Heron Road Bridge across the Cabinet Gorge Reservoir during the construction season in 2016.